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FUNERAL SERMON

ON THE LATE

CAPT. LUCIUS H. BOSTWICK.

BY REV. J. ISHAM BLISS.

JUNE 10, 1863.

SERMON,

PREACHED AT THE FUNERAL

OF

CAPT. LUCIUS H. BOSTWICK,

IN

CALVARY CHURCH, JERICHO, VT.,

JUNE 10, 1863.

BY REV. J. ISHAM BLISS.

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SERMON.

ST. JOHN, XI : 25.—I AM THE RESURRECTION AND THE LIFE; HE THAT BELIEVETH IN ME, THOUGH HE WERE DEAD, YET SHALL HE LIVE.

I. OUR LORD, we observe, concentrates Martha's attention on Himself as the original spring of life. This sister of Lazarus evidently considered that she was attributing very extraordinary dignity and influence to the mysterious man who had gone familiarly in and out of the household at Bethany, when she told him "If Thou hadst been here my brother had not died. But I know that even now, whatsoever Thou wilt ask of God, God will give it Thee." She obviously thought she was conceding very much when she recognized Him as thus puissant in procuring, but as an agent, life from God. And very much would it have been to concede, had Christ been other than He was — divine. Mighty and honored indeed must be the creature who should have such power with God, that God, out of regard to him, would at his pleasure impart to or withhold from any being the glorious gift of life.

But Martha's admission does not satisfy our Lord. He will be recognized as something more than an instrument. It is not enough for Him to be regarded simply as a means, however exalted and efficient. He is not merely the medium, the channel of life, but the source of life, nay, the life itself. "I am the resurrection and the life." How false

and inadequate, in the light of such a declaration as this, appear those views which would make Christ simply a human being, endowed it may be with extraordinary wisdom and virtue by nature or the Spirit, in order that He might be useful to His fellows by His philosophy, His instructions or His example. In the mouth of which greatest of the prophets, however full and authoritative his divine commission, would not the assertion of the text be a gross offence to us? Had one of the prophets, as a divinely inspired teacher, revealed life-giving doctrines, and only declared, as our Lord did at another time, that his words were life, *i. e.* had that derived life which had been communicated to them by the great primal fount of life, we might have freely granted his claim, but had he gone farther and dared to call himself the life, in the absolute sense of the word as employed by Christ, who, that regards idolatry as an abomination, would not have repudiated him with abhorrence? For must we not aver with David, "With Thee is the foundation of life." Do not we all know that there can be but one independent, original well of life, and that, He who is the sole, eternal generator and preserver of all things? Yet Christ unhesitatingly pronounces Himself such an original, self-subsisting spring of of life. "As the Father hath life in Himself, so hath He given to the Son to have life in Himself." Or in the, if possible, still more unconditional terms of the text, "I am the resurrection and the life."

If Christ is of any value to us, then, He is our all in all. He is even more than our prophet, priest and king, more than our instructor in righteousness, our sacrifice for sin, the prescriber and controller of our conduct; He is our very life,— our God, and that as the "living God,"—the Alpha and Omega of all physical or spiritual vitality.

II. In the second clause of the text, our Lord reveals to Martha the comprehensiveness of His meaning, in calling Himself the resurrection and the life. When He says "he that believeth in Me, though he were dead, yet shall he live," He manifestly intended to signify that He was the author and bestower of a life far more important than the mere natural, temporal life,— a life which a mere natural and physical death should be powerless to affect. So insignificant does He know the simply physical dissolution to be, compared with that nobler life which He holds in His gift, that, in the verse which follows the text, though aware that the believing Lazarus had been lying in his tomb hard by for four days, He leaves the natural death, as if unworthy even of mention, entirely out of the account, and declares unqualifiedly, "Whosoever liveth and believeth in Me shall never die." The highest favor which Martha hoped or wished the Master to obtain was a few years prolongation of her brother's natural earthly being. Christ shows her that He has power to confer a much greater blessing, in comparison with which, for its durability and richness, the one she asks is not even to be named. As has been said, "Unless the Lord had lifted Martha into a higher region of life, it had profited her little that He had granted her heart's desire. What would it have helped her to receive back her brother, if again she were presently to lose him, if once more they were to be parted asunder by his death or her own? This lower boon would only prove a boon at all if he and she were both made partakers of a higher life in Christ; then, indeed, death would have no more power over them, then they would truly possess one another, and forever; and to this the wondrously deep and loving words of Christ would lead her. * * * * * 'I am the resurrection and the life;' the *true* life, the *true*

resurrection; the everlasting triumphs over death, they are in Me. * * * In Me is victory over the grave, in Me is life eternal; by faith in Me that becomes yours, which makes death not to be death, but only the transition to a higher life."* Christ meant Martha to understand that He was more than the dispenser of our bare natural being and that He had more than the power at pleasure to prostrate or raise up these our fleshly tabernacles, though both these high prerogatives were His. He meant her to understand that He was the resurrection and the life in the broadest spiritual sense, and that to whom he was such life, whatever natural changes they might pass through, whatever experience of dissolution they might undergo, their real vitality should ever in the present world and the future remain undiminished and undisturbed; while those, to whom He was not such a life, whatever their semblance of animation, however prolonged the integrity of their bodies, however active the merely natural energies of their being, could at no time have any veritable life, and their existence, at the most, could ever be but a "living death."

Undoubtedly from Christ proceed the issues of life and death in all their lower relations. As one with the Father, and the one by whom all things consist, it is but as He sends forth His spirit that all animate beings are created, and as He "withdraws their breath, that they die and return to their dust." All these indications of vital power, which we observe in our own curiously and wonderfully wrought frames, are emanations from Him who is "the life," throbbing heart, rushing current, quivering nerve and vibrating muscle. From Him came to all our restless intellectual and moral faculties their original impulse, and by Him is

*Rev. F. W. Robertson.

their present vigor sustained. With Christ is the exclusive direction as to the how, when and where all these physical faculties shall come to a stop. Exactly in accordance with what seems good to His own will, shall He prescribe for each of us that temporary destruction, which is to come upon these houses of clay, and bid the fairest and bravest forms lie down to be "crushed before the moth." Undoubtedly also it is Christ alone who has the power to rear again these crumbled temples. It will be His life-infusing voice only that in the latter days can penetrate the dull earth of the innumerable millions of our great brotherhood, who now but as ashes lie mingled with the clods of the valley, sprinkled on lone mountain tops, mouldering under cathedral arches, strewn on war fields, garnered in classic urns, sepulchred in hill sides, citadeled within pyramids, wrapped in polar snows, tossed in wandering graves of the sea, and cause the senseless matter again to take human shape and motion, "bone come to bone, sinew, flesh and skin covering them," all as of old, so far as the needs of the occupant for the new state of existence appointed him require. Christ is the resurrection and the life so far as all this, and this is not a little; but is He so no farther? Were Christ's vitalizing capabilities exhausted by imparting to us originally our merely physical and intellectual activities, or by hereafter re-animating our disorganized bodies, and rejoining them to our souls in an eternal union, divine as would be such power, could He satisfy our want? could He be our life to the full? could He be our life in the most momentous sense? Had Christ, as the Life, ability only to bestow upon us this earthly natural life and then power to do no more, to how many would the grant be but a doubtful benefit. How many writhing in physical and mental anguish, with no hope

beyond, might naturally groan out with Job, "Perish the day wherein I was born." "Wherefore is light given to him that is in misery, and life unto the bitter in soul."

Were Christ's ability as the Resurrection limited to the strict literal raising of our bodies, what advantage could He be to us, could He not also furnish us a power to save ourselves from rising but to a resurrection of condemnation? For some "shall awake to shame and everlasting contempt," as well as some "to everlasting life." No, "it is not all of life to live," in the ordinary earthly sense, nor "all of death to die," in the ordinary earthly sense. Life and death have far profounder and weightier meanings than these, meanings which often subvert and contradict the common and superficial significations, and point out, as we have intimated, many a seeming life to be a real death, and many a seeming death to be but the development of a fuller and more real life.

True death consists not simply in a dissolution in the relations of a man's soul and body, but in a dissolution in the relations between a man's soul and God's spirit. *True life* consists not simply in preserving the natural union of man's physical and intellectual constitution, but in preserving the spiritual union between man's soul and God.

St. Paul exactly defines true life and death, when he declares that "to be carnally minded is death; but to be spiritually minded is life and peace;" that is, to yield to the dictates of that fallen, fleshly, selfish nature by which the first Adam separated the race from God, is death; but to yield to the dictates of that renewed, spiritual, divine nature by which the second Adam reunites the race to God, is "life and peace." Thus to be spiritually brought near and made one with God is the only life indeed, and to be

spiritually sundered and made distant from God, the only death indeed. Apart from a vital, spiritual communion with God, whatever show of life our lower powers may exhibit, our existence can be but "a death in life;" but with this communion, whatever show of death the disintegration of our lower powers may exhibit, there will still remain a "life in death." It is because He is the rescuer of us from this deeper death that Christ is most significantly "the Resurrection;" it is because He is the imparter of this higher life that Christ is most significantly "the Life." To lead its true life, every living creature must fulfil the established divine law of its own particular being. The life that the moss, the oak and the lion manifest, is in each excellent and beautiful in its degree; but the oak, to live its true life, must live a higher life than the moss; the lion, to live his true life, must live a higher life than either moss or oak. The higher creature cannot be restricted to the lower creature's life and not perish. Man, a spiritual and immortal creature, cannot lead a simply mortal and natural life, and not undergo spiritual death. We were made in the image of God, and designed in our sphere to be actuated by the same holy impulses as our Creator, to have the same fellowship with Him, and to have, as our ends, kindred spiritual pursuits. According as we come short in fulfilling this idea of our being, our true life is destroyed, and spiritual death and confusion ensue.

Who of us has not at times felt a sad consciousness that he was less than he should be, that he has somehow failed to meet the true design of his being? Who does not at times see before him an ideal human life far different from that which he has actualised? Who has not at times heard a still small voice deep within, proclaiming with irresistible force that he, the offspring of the spiritual God, an heir of

immortal existence, was created for some nobler purpose than to go through that petty round of physical and intellectual earthly labors and enjoyments, which make up a mere worldly life,— eating, drinking, buying, selling, struggling for a little more empty social, professional or political honor.

In the beautiful words of another*: "We all long, occasionally at least, do we not, for reconciliation with the Almighty Spirit, that lives and breathes on every side of us, in these skies and shores, these heart-beats in our breasts, and these pulses of the ocean on the beach. Which one of you is content — deeply, thoroughly content, with a decorous and prosperous and cultured career? Is there no crying out from within for the living God? Does not the infinite and solemn mystery challenge us from the hours of suffering and of silence and even of gladness itself? Does not the very beauty of the earth and the sea and the sky awaken an awful sense of the 'light that never was on sea or shore?'" What are these dissatisfactions and yearnings but sure reminders that a richer and sublimer life than the one we naturally pursue has been intended for us? Then in so far as we have not lived this higher life, by reason of substituting in its place a lower life, we have lost it and become spiritually dead. All of us must admit that this has been our case. How then are we to be set right? How is this lost true life to be restored to us? Can we bring it back ourselves? God and our own experience reply with an earnest 'No!' The dead cannot raise themselves. The Scriptures unqualifiedly declare "that the carnal mind is not subject to God's law, neither indeed can be." However distinct our perception that we ought to do so, we find, when we are left to the direction and aid of our simply natural

*F. D. Huntington, D. D.

impulses, that we do not succeed in bringing ourselves into a peaceful, congenial, affectionate intercourse with our Heavenly Father, that there is some estrangement and obstruction between us which ever remains unremoved. However desirable and beautiful in our better moments may appear that life of purity, love, peace, holiness, heavenly mindedness, which our conscience approves as the fulfilment of the divine law upon us, we find, on attempting to realize it, that it is utterly beyond our unassisted attainment; we find "another law in our members warring against the law of our mind." Our good sentiments, impulses, resolutions come to no effect: our passions, selfish desires, earthly-mindedness still keep their dominion over us. We yet remain "*dead* in trespasses and sins." We cannot save ourselves. "Who," then, "shall deliver us from the body of this death? I thank God, through Jesus Christ our Lord,"—our Resurrection and our Life. "God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth on Him should not perish, but have everlasting life." "And this is the record, that God hath given to us eternal life; and this life is in His Son. Whosoever hath the Son hath life; and he that hath not the Son of God hath not life." The sum and substance of the gospel is the "good news" it brings of a restorer to impoverished and undone men, of that true eternal life from which they have fallen. Christ came not as a mere teacher or example, but as the heavenly "bread of life," as the divine dispenser of spiritual vitality to men. "He was manifested to abolish death and bring life and immortality to light." By His own death He destroys the *penalty* of man's death; by his personal in-dwelling through His Spirit, He destroys the *dominion* of this death and brings to light a higher than the original life.

And this divine life is accessible to us all. "As in Adam all die, so in Christ 'may' all be made alive." "Whosoever will let him take of the water of life freely." "Whoso cometh to Me I will in no wise cast out." All that we have to do is to come to Christ; to believe in Him as the life: like St. Paul, "to live the life we live in the flesh by faith in the Son of God." Faith in the appointed Savior is the simple instrumentality through which descends the great blessing. "The just shall live by faith." Can we but be persuaded to exercise this faith, Christ will assuredly pour into our thirsty souls those spiritual "living waters" which shall be in us "a well of water springing up into everlasting life;" a new principle will be established in us; affectionate communion will be opened with our divine Father; greater harmony be introduced into the several parts of our own nature; a supernatural strength afforded us successfully to conquer the world, the flesh and the devil; and that entire sanctification and ennobling of our being be begun, to go on increasingly through time, and when He that is our resurrection shall bring our purified bodies and souls again together for their higher immortal union, to be consummated in that never to be interrupted state of holiness, where "our life shall be completely hid with Christ in God," and the Life evermore dwell in us as God dwells in Him.

I do not know, dear friends, in this heavy grief with which God has seen fit to afflict us, where we shall look for more substantial consolation than in the just confidence we feel that he, whom we mourn, was and is a partaker of that divine and imperishable life we have been describing. No one familiar with our dear young brother's spiritual course can doubt that "the life he lived in the flesh, he lived by faith in the Son of God." No one can doubt that he was a true believer in the Lord Jesus Christ. With this assurance

we cannot lament as for the dead. Our brother has departed from us, but he not is dead. He will no more go in and out among us as was his wont. The earthly places which have known him will now know him no more. This little sanctuary will never again echo his voice raised in prayer and praise. His home and the homes of neighbors and associates will not again be brightened by his quiet, gladdening presence. A solemn change has come over his physical frame; the spirit has separated from it. The soft light that beamed from his eyes is now quenched. His heart and pulse no longer beat. All his senses have become sealed and his body is soon to be laid away in the earth to return to its kindred dust. Yet he is not dead. He still lives. The great author and sustainer of life makes us certain of this. "Whosoever liveth and believeth in Me shall never die." "He that believeth in Me, though he were dead, yet shall he live." Under different and, as the Scriptures assure us, under better conditions, in an existence unfamiliar to us, he who has left us yet lives in all that constitutes the best sense of life. Christ was his resurrection and life in this world, and will continue to be his resurrection and life in that other world, on which he has now entered. He has only gone on to manifest, in a higher sphere and free from the embarrassments of earth, that divine, eternal life which was begun in him here. We may bewail our own loss, we may bewail our deprivation of his conscious presence, of his gentle looks, kind words and useful deeds; but we cannot bewail his death; for he is not dead. He has simply attained to a higher form of life than we have yet reached. Now for the first time indeed may he be said to truly and entirely live. It is barely the accidentals surrounding his existence which are affected by the great change which has come upon him; the great, essential, vital principle of his being has only devel-

oped into a fuller and freer activity by it. What an inexpressible comfort, in a sorrow like ours, ought our Lord's consoling words in the text, then, to be!

Most of you, who are assembled here, were personally acquainted with LUCIUS BOSTWICK, and it needs no affirmation of mine to make you aware that he possessed a character of no ordinary purity and sweetness. Having just entered upon manhood, he had had comparatively little opportunity of making the beautiful qualities of his nature felt in the way of public achievement; yet it may be truthfully said that, in those positions of public responsibility suitable to his age which he had already occupied, he acquitted himself with marked credit to himself and to the satisfaction of those to whom he was responsible. But his life, until the last year, was mainly spent among you in the quiet discharge of private duties, and seldom are these duties more faithfully performed than they were by him. His merit consisted, not merely in the amount of actual accomplishment achieved, but as much in the admirable spirit with which all he did was performed.

The grace of God, acting upon a disposition of peculiar natural amiability, enabled him indeed to present a character of rare loveliness. Few persons so directly win the confidence and affection of all with whom they come in contact. It seems impossible for one to have known him and not to have loved him. From his childhood's companions to his comrades in the army, his associates felt towards him not only respect, but a peculiar warmth of affection. It could hardly have been otherwise, exhibiting the remarkable gentleness and unselfishness he did. He possessed almost feminine delicacy and tenderness of feeling, and from boyhood showed a consideration and thoughtfulness for the wants of others seldom seen. It had ever

seemed one of his chief delights to find out some grateful attention which he could offer to some one in need of it.

He was eminently humble and unobtrusive in feeling and deportment. Naturally retiring, he instinctively shrunk from conspicuous positions and posts of responsibility. His high conscientiousness often forced him into places of trust which he would otherwise gladly have escaped occupying. His unaffected modesty of manner and language both bound the hearts of all his old friends to him and at once attracted all appreciative strangers to him.

He was above all characterized by a strong sense of duty. This indeed was the great anchor as well as ornament of his character. Once assured that a thing ought to be done, he, at whatever personal cost, did it. Those of you, who are familiar with the faithfulness with which he discharged his obligations to his family, to his friends, to his church, at home, in the army, or in whatever relation he was placed, will bear witness to this. His strict conscientiousness and lofty principle gave a vigor and firmness to his character hardly to be expected in one by nature so yielding and unassuming. Self distrustful as he was, he could always be depended upon to do what he thought it became him to do.

It was the same controlling sense of duty which actuated him in other circumstances, that impelled him to offer himself to that service in which he finally laid down his life. Few, we believe, have taken up arms in defence of their country, influenced by purer or more unselfish motives. Constitutionally he was of anything but a martial spirit. His nature was too merciful and kind for the necessary cruelties of war in themselves not to be abhorrent to him. But he believed that our country needed the arm of her young sons to save her from a fearful peril. He believed that, situated as he was, he could better respond to this need than many others,

and enlisting as a common soldier, he went forth with his life in his hand, never, as it has pleased God, to bring that life back again.

Our hearts may properly bleed at our own bereavement of one so beautiful and brave and good, to many of whom he was so inexpressibly dear, but we cannot sorrow for *him*. He fought a good fight. As a man, as a soldier, as a Christian, he performed well his part. He has gone to receive his crown; he has passed on higher; he has completed the most difficult stage of human existence; he has attained that goal towards which God would have all his human creatures tend — a blessed immortality.

It is no fiction, dear brethren, that he who believes in Jesus Christ shall "never die." There is no more substantial reality than that Jesus Christ is, to those who receive Him, an actual, eternal resurrection and life. The eternal Vine itself may as soon perish as those branches which it supplies with its living sap. Since he, whom we loved so well, is not perished, but has only ascended to a fuller life, though we sorrow, we may do it with a high and holy hope for him,— and for ourselves, if we share in that life he possessed here, that we too, not long hence, shall go to share with him, in that more glorious life which he possesses now, in that blessed region where there shall be "no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying," but where we shall enjoy an endless existence of inconceivable purity and bliss, in the immediate presence of Him who is our "Resurrection and our Life."

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